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**SHORTGRASS COUNTRY by Monte Noelke**

The Shortgrass Country hasn't dried out since before Christmas. Clear water seeps down the cow trails. Feed runs are a haphazard affair, with about as much cake being trampled into the mud as eaten by the cattle.

Credit for these rains goes to a weather condition called "El Nino." Supposing the weathermen's diagnosis is correct, all of the stud colts and half of the kids born in '92 are going to have a name related to El Nino.

Local polls may continue to find an undecided element, but the safe money says Shortgrassers are going to endorse this rainmaker by a majority that'll make the biggest landslide to ever pass through the electoral college look like a Cape Cod fisherman taking a sounding on the dock side of his dinghy.

The first I heard of this El Nino business was a year or so ago down on the equator on the Gallapagos Islands. Sailors said when Nino warmed up the surface of the ocean, the fish swam deeper and the diving birds grew so hungry and dove from such advanced altitudes, they broke their necks from the impact of hitting the water.

Practically the same phenomenon occurs over in San Angelo among the hollow horn traders on seasons of abrupt market failures. Just like the foolhardy birds followers of

feeders and futures will tear out of the auction ring, head down the hall, and turn left into the swinging glass doors at twice the speed those doors can open.

1991 turned out to be the first time we've had any holdover moisture to pass into the new year. Areas afflicted by flooding, I feel sure, won't want to renew their subscription to El Nino, but out here in the desert it'll always be a best seller.